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The Honourable Larry Bagnell

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● (1100)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.)): Good morning. Welcome to the 121st meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs as we continue our study of Bill C-76, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and other acts and to make certain consequential amendments.

We are pleased to be joined by Greg Essensa, the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario. He is appearing by video conference from Toronto.

Thank you for making yourself available today, Mr. Essensa. I know you're very busy, so I'm glad we could finally get a time together. This is very exciting for us. We have lots of great questions.

You can proceed with some opening remarks. We did get your notes, but we haven't translated them yet, which means we can't circulate them yet.

If you would go ahead with your opening remarks, that would be great.

Mr. Greg Essensa (Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Ontario): Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. I would like to begin by thanking the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for inviting me to provide my observations on Bill C-76, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and other acts and to make certain consequential amendments.

I welcome the chance to offer you my insights and observations on the electoral process. When I provide comments to a committee of the House of Commons, I am very aware that I am addressing Canada's lawmakers.

Today I would like to briefly address the following topics: the provisions of the bill and my observations from Ontario's 2018 general election.

In reviewing the provisions of this bill and other bills related to elections, I always ask myself whether the change protects the integrity of the electoral process, preserves fairness and promotes transparency. I have reviewed this bill closely and I offer the following observations.

The bill offers amendments that, if passed, would improve access and reduce barriers to voting. A number of the provisions in this bill were implemented in Ontario, and I am highly supportive of them.

I specifically want to highlight the provision that allows voter information cards as a piece of identification. The voter information card is a staple of electoral administration and, in my humble opinion, a core piece of the Canadian electoral fabric. The voter information card unites every elector group, giving them the confidence that they are registered, and provides them with the information they require to cast their ballot. This proposed amendment creates consistency with Ontario's identification requirements, and I applaud this government for recognizing its importance.

Additionally, lengthening the election calendar and extending advance poll hours are important amendments to contribute to the success of the election. I appreciate the flexibility that these provisions and others provide to the chief electoral officer. Election administrators are in the best position to make decisions on how elections are delivered. Allowing the chief electoral officer to make decisions on their mandates while complying with legislation is a key factor of success in overseeing elections.

I will now turn my attention to third party regulation. In 2016 Ontario implemented substantive reform with respect to election finances. While Ontario was undergoing significant electoral reform, I had been asked, and agreed, to serve as an adviser to the Standing Committee on General Government. This committee undertook an extensive process in consulting the public by travelling Ontario and hearing from interested individuals and stakeholder groups on the proposed legislation.

I also appeared three times in front of the standing committee to provide my thoughts on the provisions in this bill. My messaging in this area has been simple and consistent. The concept of the level playing field is central to our democracy. It is also a unifying principle of election administration, tying together the voting process and the campaign process.

Election outcomes are intended to reflect the genuine will of the people. Political finance rules are in place to ensure that all political actors have an equal opportunity to raise and spend funds to advance their message and win votes. Electoral outcomes should not be distorted because of unequal opportunities to influence the electorate. Third parties are no exception to this. Creating a regulation system for third parties is critical in creating a level playing field, and I am supportive of the proposed provisions in this bill.

There are amendments in this bill that align with Ontario's model, with some exceptions. Spending thresholds differ in Ontario compared with what is being proposed in Bill C-76. While I will not comment on the specific amounts and whether it is appropriate or not, what is important to me is that regulation be in place prior to the writ period and during the writ period. In Ontario, prior to the legislative reform in 2016, we never had pre-writ regulation. It was something I long advocated for because of the lack of transparency on what could be incurred by third parties in the six months leading up to an election.

One feature of Bill C-76 that I am quite supportive of is the requirement for third parties to provide interim reports. I believe this contributes to effective oversight and better transparency.

I would also like to highlight the area of foreign spending. I strongly support restricting third parties from using funds from a foreign entity. However, this bill does not address how it will regulate this source of funding. There are no requirements to disclose where third parties are receiving funding from, which could very well be from foreign entities. I highlight that for the committee to consider.

Overall, I view these provisions as a step in the right direction.

The next area I would like to address involves the provisions related to enforcement. In order to effectively enforce, it is important to provide regulators with the tools they require.

● (1105)

I am pleased to see the commissioner of Canada elections' ability to issue administrative monetary penalties, compel testimony and lay charges where he or she deems fit. I also believe it is appropriate that the commissioner of Canada elections be relocated to the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer. Being equipped with these tools allows the commissioner to fulfill the mandate effectively and maintain public trust by holding political actors accountable.

I would now like to focus the remainder of my time on my observations from Ontario's 2018 general election.

This year's election saw an unprecedented amount of change. Elections Ontario operationalized four different pieces of legislation in advance of the June 2018 election. These amendments enabled Ontario to implement new boundaries, new technology, new staffing models, new processes and modern tools for all elections-related stakeholders.

The 2018 general election in Ontario, in my humble opinion, was a great success, and the legislation helped support our efforts to provide greater access and modernized services to electors.

There are a few key areas that I'd like to highlight for your consideration.

The first is privacy and security. With an increased focus on personal data and intrusion into public networks, privacy and cybersecurity were and are top of mind.

This was the first general election where technology was implemented, including e-poll books to strike off electors and vote-counting equipment to count ballots.

In order to ensure security, we worked closely with the provincial security adviser, who was appointed by Ontario's secretary of cabinet. We went to him to seek advice on ensuring our processes and systems met thresholds and limited the risk of threat. In coordination with the provincial security adviser, Elections Ontario had a security expert carry out comprehensive audits of our systems, processes and people. The report recommended a number of actions that we implemented to reduce vulnerability.

There is little evidence to suggest that the 2018 general election in Ontario was significantly affected by cybersecurity intrusions, fake news or any other form of electronic interference.

The last area I'd like to speak to is third party spending. With a new regime in place, similar to Bill C-76, third parties now had registration requirements and spending limits for both the pre-writ and writ periods. In the 2018 general election we had a total of 59 third party registrants—34 in the six-month pre-writ period and 25 during the writ period. By comparison, in 2014 we only had 37 third parties registered in the writ period. This represented a 59% increase in the total number of third parties that registered compared to 2014.

At this time it is difficult to assess the overall impact of the new regulations, as we will not receive full financial filings until December of this year. However, I am confident that regulation significantly impacted how much money was spent on third party advertising. I will give you an example. In 2014, 37 registered third parties spent approximately $8.67 million during the writ period alone. In 2018, we had 25 third parties registered in the writ period who, combined, could only have spent $2.55 million under the new regime. This represents a decrease of more than $6.12 million in spending during the writ period. This is a significant reduction, and I look forward to seeing the final expenses of all third parties in December.

One area of challenge for us, though, was in registration requirements. In Ontario, similar to the provisions in Bill C-76, a third party is only required to register once it incurs $500 in expenses. This registration requirement was a challenge for us to navigate and regulate. We received numerous complaints on third parties, many of which had not registered with us, as they kept their spending under $500. The result was unregulated third party advertising. The difficulty we encountered was that many of these parties spent money on advertising exclusively through the Internet. This made it a challenge to ascertain if and when they went past the $500 threshold.

Third party registration is an area of reform I will be commenting on to Ontario's legislators early next year, and something you may wish to consider as a review in this bill.

I would finally like to take this opportunity to thank the committee for inviting me to speak and to offer my perspectives as chief electoral officer of Ontario. I applaud the work this committee is doing on electoral reform, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.

● (1110)

The Chair: Thank you very much. That certainly addressed a number of the topics that people wanted to address, so that's great. I appreciate your time.

Now we'll start some questioning with Mr. Simms from the Liberal Party.

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Essensa, thank you very much for this. I thoroughly enjoyed it. You were well worth the wait, sir.

Mr. Greg Essensa: Thank you.

Mr. Scott Simms: I'll start with the last point that you made concerning your difficulty ascertaining who went above $500 in spending. That causes some alarm

You said you were going to make recommendations to legislators in Queen's Park. Very briefly, what would they be?

Mr. Greg Essensa: I would actually recommend that they either take the $500 threshold off and it be a zero threshold or extend the threshold to a higher number, $3,000, $5,000, something that is a little easier to ascertain.

Mr. Scott Simms: I see. So the higher dollar value, obviously.... You're saying there is basically a minimum dollar amount where it becomes detectable, if I can use that word.

Mr. Greg Essensa: It was very difficult to ascertain the $500 with the Internet providers.

Sometimes there were discounts on banner ads and it became a real challenge, as an administration perspective.

Mr. Scott Simms: I see.

Mr. Greg Essensa: My recommendation to you, as you're reviewing Bill C-76, would be to consider either increasing the threshold so that it is relatively easy for the commissioner of Canada elections to ascertain whether they met that threshold or not.

Mr. Scott Simms: Okay, I appreciate that.

I want to go to one of the first things you talked about. I couldn't agree with you more about the voter information card, as you put it, being a staple for our voting, the core. I want to thank you for that because I am glad it is returning.

Within this legislation we're returning some things that were taken out with prior legislation. We're also adding—I guess you could say we're updating—to today's context, and—

I'm sorry; I had to sneeze.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Your emotions took over.

Mr. Scott Simms: I know. I'm verklempt completely.

I've been in this business now for 15 years; I've been elected for almost 15, and five elections in, so I'm always interested.... The idea about vouching. It is a right—it's in our charter—to vote, and sometimes as we get lost in the conversation about ascertaining the right identification, we keep forgetting that it is a person's right to vote. Therefore, we have to keep that in mind. I think vouching goes a long way for that.

How do you feel about the vouching contained within this legislation, or the changes that are in this legislation?

● (1115)

Mr. Greg Essensa: I think any provision in any electoral reform bill that enhances both the integrity and the transparency of the electoral process, while ensuring that we provide access to every eligible elector to exercise their right to vote, is paramount.

We don't have vouching in Ontario. We have not used that in very many years. I know it has been used federally. I have witnessed it at various elections I have attended to.

If it assists certain segments of the electorate who find difficulty with appropriate ID and other challenges I am always supportive of that.

Mr. Scott Simms: There are other things contained within this legislation. For instance, you talked about a pre-writ period and throwing more transparency upon the pre-writ period. You're obviously in favour of that.

Mr. Greg Essensa: Yes, I have written quite extensively about that over the last 10 years, in my role as CEO. I am a firm believer that all political actors should be treated equitably and fairly. Where political parties and candidates have spending limits and expense limitations, third parties in Ontario for a long period of time had no such requirements. It meant that third parties would spend unknown amounts of money during that period because there was no transparency, there was no regulation, and there was no requirement for them to provide any information to us, as the regulator.

There were always concerns raised by a multitude of different parties that this was an unfair advantage, and sometimes it could potentially impact the electoral results.

I had advocated for a long period of time that we needed to treat all political actors fairly and equitably and under the guiding principle of a fair and level playing field.

Mr. Scott Simms: Yes, and that playing field you did talk about certainly should incorporate up to six months before the election day, and not just in the precise writ period. Would that be correct?

Mr. Greg Essensa: I would agree. One part of the provision of your bill that I actually quite like is the requirement to have those third parties provide interim reports. The more transparency we can provide as to who is expending what type of expenditures in advertising as well as who is contributing to third parties I think goes a long way to building the health and strength of our democracy.

Mr. Scott Simms: Speaking of this, it leads to my next question and the interim reports that you like, which are outlined in this legislation. Do you think there is enough interim reporting, or should there be a higher requirement for interim reports?

Mr. Greg Essensa: I think that, any time you make substantive electoral reform, you really need to go through one electoral cycle to be able to assess. What I said when we were deliberating Bill 2 here in Ontario is that we were making substantive reforms on the campaign in electoral financing regime here in Ontario. My recommendation was that we needed to go through one electoral cycle so that we could see how it operationalized itself. Then folks in my role could comment back to the legislators when we may have to tweak some provision or make some amendment based on the facts of what we've seen has happened.

Mr. Scott Simms: Yes, I think that's a valid point, road testing any particular type of thing that we do. It could be like administrative penalties and that sort of thing, which I and obviously you are in favour of. I think maybe other agencies in the federal government should look at that model.

Nevertheless, in the few minutes that I have left, I want to talk about flexibility.

The Chair: You have one minute.

Mr. Scott Simms: In the one minute that I have left, as I've been reminded.

In an organization such as yours, obviously being arm's length from the government and independent of government, flexibility is key. Can you expand on that, and not just for doing your job for voting, but also communicating to voters what your role is to promote voting and participation?

Mr. Greg Essensa: Ontario, not dissimilar to Canada, is obviously a large and very diverse province. I've often advocated that legislators should write legislation and provide its flexibility to their electoral administrators, because we are in the best position to make determinations.

For example, if I take this pair of glasses and the legislation tells me to put them in my right hand, put them in my left hand and then put them on the table, I find that very prescriptive. I would prefer the legislators tell me they want me to use the glasses. That's fine. I can figure out how best to use them. I can tell you that, in Ontario, how we would use the glasses in Kenora would differ from Windsor, would differ from Ottawa—Vanier and differ from Toronto—St. Paul's.

Mr. Scott Simms: That was a very nice job. Thank you.

● (1120)

The Chair: Thank you.

It's over to the Conservatives with Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate your final comments about how something might work in Kenora versus Ottawa—Vanier, and I may come back to that at the end or in a future round, if I have time.

I want to pick up on something you mentioned when you talked about cybersecurity and threats. Maybe I'm reading too much into it, but I'd like your feedback. You mentioned there was little evidence that there was a threat or any concern. When you say "little evidence", does that indicate there was some evidence or are you saying that more generally as a kind of "cover your butt" type of comment there was some evidence but it was discounted? I'm just curious. It was an interesting choice of words.

Mr. Greg Essensa: In any election the size of Ontario's or the size of Canada's, there has to be a consideration of cybersecurity on all fronts and on all means that we utilize both public data, public information, and the electoral process as a whole.

We spend considerable time, as I articulated, working with privacy and provincial security experts to have them come in and do a full scope of penetration, infiltration testing and pen testing of all of our systems to ensure that they were secure throughout the event.

I've been conducting elections for 30 years. There were clearly attempts to infiltrate our systems. None were successful, and that's what I meant by "little evidence". There was no evidence of anyone being successful in accessing any of our data electronically or by any other means, but it doesn't mean that people didn't try.

Mr. John Nater: I appreciate that. Following up on that, are there information-sharing mechanisms between you as Elections Ontario with Elections Canada on attempts that may have been made?

Mr. Greg Essensa: I've already met with folks from CSE federally and CSIS federally. We've provided them all of our materials. We've provided them all of the documentation on the penetration and infiltration testing that we did. I have met with the CEO of Elections Canada. We've provided them advice and guidance on what we experienced during the 2018 general election as well as provided them access any time that they have questions. We are more than happy to assist and help in any manner whatsoever.

Mr. John Nater: Great. Thank you, sir, for that.

As part of the provincial legislation that was brought in in 2016, there was an element to prohibit collusion between third parties and between third parties and other political actors in terms of advertising, in terms of co-operation. I have two questions from that.

First, was there any evidence that there was collusion between third parties and political actors or among third parties to get around some of the limits? Did that happen? Were there any allegations of that?

The second one is on the challenge of enforcement. How is that proven? How is that dealt with from an enforcement standpoint? What powers does Elections Ontario have to enforce that and to determine whether that's happened or not?

Mr. Greg Essensa: There was no evidence whatsoever during this election that there had been any collusion whatsoever. There were some complaints, which we investigated fully, but we determined there was no factual evidence of anything. I had recommended prior to the deliberation on Bill 2 that they reform the definition of "collusion" in the previous Election Finances Act because I did not feel comfortable that it met the requirements we would need at Elections Ontario.

At Elections Ontario, I have the same authority that a public inquiries judge has, so I can compel testimony. I can compel information from financial institutions. I can compel any such information in the course of an investigation. I was supportive of the current bill in providing that to the commissioner of elections because that authority helps escalate the investigative nature and enforcement nature of our business. It reduces time substantively. We don't have to get into a big long-winded debate with political actors, because we have that authority. It's already enshrined into our legislation to compel that information, and it, quite frankly, speeds up the enforcement process considerably.

Mr. John Nater: That leads into something that Mr. Simms talked about a little bit, in terms of third party registration, using that $500 limit, either lowering it to nothing or increasing it. Certainly $500 doesn't go very far. I'm curious as to what resources an entity like Elections Ontario, or in our case Elections Canada, has available to seek out those examples of third parties. Certainly if I were to run third party ads for under $500 in Skeena—Bulkley Valley, for example—

● (1125)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Don't do it.

Mr. John Nater: No, don't do it. Unless my colleague Mr. Cullen has people actively looking for these ads running in a remote part of his riding, conceivably it's a challenge to determine where that's happening and when that's happening. What type of resources are needed to determine whether this is or isn't happening, and what type of resources ought we to be considering at a federal level?

Mr. Greg Essensa: I would suggest to you they would be considerable. Quite simply, with the advent of the Internet, and its utilization now as a major, what I would call, advertising forum for political entities to utilize, it is a challenge. We receive a number of complaints from political parties, from other political actors, from stakeholders, and it's resource intensive to try to find out exactly whether that third party went past the threshold. You have to work very extensively with a lot of the social media networks and companies. Sometimes they provide discount advertising, so where it might appear to us that a third party has gone over the $500 threshold, when we do a little further investigation, we realize they got a discount rate on some ads and they're below it. It's just very, very labour-intensive. We had to substantially increase our election compliance team during the writ period.

The other issue pertaining to this is simply time. We have a 28-day writ period. When these complaints come in, we feel the need to try to investigate them as quickly and as effectively as possible to determine whether those third parties do need to register with us so there is greater transparency under that regime.

Mr. John Nater: I have just a few seconds left in this round, but to follow up on that, how have your response and working relationship been with the social media networks, with Facebook, with Twitter and with Instagram? Has there been a strong or useful working relationship with them? What kind of response have you had from those networks?

Mr. Greg Essensa: I think we have found that the social media networks we have dealt with, the main ones which you just articulated, have been very forthcoming to work with. I think for some of the issues there have been, which have garnered a great deal of media attention over the last year or so, certainly with us here in Ontario, the response has been very favourable. They were quick to respond to us and to get us the information we needed. They did not try to get away from providing us that information in a timely fashion.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll go to the aforementioned second most beautiful riding in the country.

Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: On a point of privilege, Chair, again, your riding is quite pretty—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nathan Cullen:—and if only you could see it in the darkness of the Yukon, we'd be able to verify that, whereas Skeena—Bulkley Valley is just gorgeous all the time.

Sorry about that, Mr. Essensa. It's a long-running battle between the chair and me.

If a third party takes out an ad on Facebook in Ontario, do they have to identify who paid for the ad?

Mr. Greg Essensa: At present they don't, unless they pass that $500 threshold.

Then, they have to register with us. They have to provide all of the other requirements in Bill 2, which includes who is funding their campaigns, who is making contributions, as well as expenses they are incurring.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Imagine there is a manufacturers association or a pharmaceutical association. They place a number of ads across the social media spectrum and they form a group to sponsor the ads, something like "Pharmaceuticals for Ontario", and they exceed the $500 limit. They place that name underneath it, and then report to you where all the individual funding came from for that ad campaign. Is that right?

Mr. Greg Essensa: That is correct.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Is there any identification of whether that money is entirely sourced within Canada, or can it be internationally sourced as well?

Mr. Greg Essensa: It's one of the challenges, because the third parties only have to indicate to us where they source that money during the writ period. If they bring money through the campaign prior to the writ period or registration, there's no requirement for them to indicate to us exactly where those funds came from.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I'm thinking more of, by nature, multi-national associations, be they oil, gas or pharmaceutical. If you simply stock the money pre-writ, you put a million bucks into the bank that you collected from a number of organizations, form an association, and then in the writ period spend that $1 million on ads promoting a certain policy or agenda, and then the accountability back to Ontarians.... They wouldn't know if that money came from the United States, Europe, China, or if it was entirely Canadian. Is that right?

● (1130)

Mr. Greg Essensa: Outside of the third party indicating to us that the money had come from some foreign entity, we would not be able to see that. It is one of the things I will be commenting on to Ontario's legislators. It's why I brought it forward in my speaking comments that, as you are reviewing this bill, I don't see a similar type of provision that would prevent third parties, in the circumstance you described, from using foreign money. It's something you may wish to consider.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: There was the very highlighted case of....

Let me start with this first to help the committee. What privacy rules are political parties subjected to right now? Are they subjected to the Ontario privacy act in terms of disclosing the data that parties collect? Also, can voters gain access to what parties have collected about them individually?

Mr. Greg Essensa: In Ontario, a political party has to provide to me an acceptable privacy policy.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: An acceptable privacy policy?

Mr. Greg Essensa: Yes. We have worked with our information and privacy commissioner's team to develop what guidelines need to be incurred in that policy. We provide samples and examples of what is acceptable to us. Every political party must provide that to my office prior to receiving any of the tools, voters lists, maps, etc., in connection with an election. Should they not—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: For example, is one of those guidelines or things they have to follow that if a voter phones the New Democrats, the Conservatives or the Liberals and says that he or she wants all the data they have on him or her, does the party have to then disclose that to the voter? The right to know, essentially, is what....

Mr. Greg Essensa: No, that's not part of our privacy policy.

What our privacy policy indicates is that the information we provide to the political parties is to be used for the electoral purpose for that general election. Their requirement is that they dissolve that information, and provide to me a certificate indicating they have eliminated all of that information from their files. The information we provide—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That's the main piece. You give them the voter list, for example, and the parties then have to prove to you that they've then since removed all of that data from their systems.

Mr. Greg Essensa: And that they've destroyed the data.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: You looked into the Highway 407 data breach. Is that right?

Mr. Greg Essensa: There is a conjunctive investigation ongoing with the York Regional Police and my office.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Is it ongoing?

Mr. Greg Essensa: It is ongoing.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: In that case, and correct me if I'm wrong, the allegations were that some 600,000 customers had their data, more or less...?

Mr. Greg Essensa: I am really not in a position to comment on an ongoing investigation.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: As we look at federal laws right now, the only thing that's required under this bill is that parties have a privacy policy. That's what's required federally. There are no limits, restrictions or even best practices that are described in the bill, of which our now permanent Chief Electoral Officer has been critical. The Privacy Commissioner has been incredibly critical.

How important is having strong and enforceable privacy rules within our election laws?

Mr. Greg Essensa: I think it's critical. You have to go no further than to read many of the publications on issues of Facebook and other social media issues that have been raised in the last several months.

I think it is incumbent on political parties and all political actors to ensure the personal privacy of those individuals whose information they've been given.

I am supportive of our regime in Ontario. It requires political parties to effectively swear to me that they've destroyed that information, and it's no longer in their domain.

I think that Bill C-76 should consider revisions or amendments to strengthen the privacy requirements. I think all Canadians would expect that.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I have one last question that might be difficult to answer.

We were talking about social media. Going back to that topic, it's not just the placement of ads encouraging voters to think about certain issues. We've also heard from some of our U.S. colleagues that the search algorithms that are used and what gets profiled in people's newsfeeds can be either intentionally or unintentionally manipulated so that certain news stories come up and are directed and subtargeted at certain voters. Do you have any insights into that, as we're designing this law?

You talked about fairness at the very beginning of your presentation. If someone is able to make Google always point in a certain way so that when people search "Ontario election" or "Canadian election", a certain party or issue always pops up, is there any prescription we can place into law to help clarify that or pull the veil back?

● (1135)

Mr. Greg Essensa: I wish I could give you a concrete solution to this problem. I think this is something that chief electoral officers are discussing amongst ourselves. This is a new facet and regime that we're seeing with the advent of the Internet and these large social media companies that, as you correctly articulated, can direct messaging to a certain segment of society.

At this particular time as an electoral administrator, I don't have a clear-cut solution for you. I think it is something that legislators, experts in the field of social media, and electoral administrators need to work on to find an effective solution. I do believe Canadians would expect that of us.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll go to Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to start with your pre-writ spending limits for parties, not third parties. What is that limit for Ontario?

Mr. Greg Essensa: In Ontario, it was $1 million in pre-writ spending for political parties during the six months prior to the event.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Has that been consistent or was that a change that came about in your last legislation?

Mr. Greg Essensa: With the changes in Bill 2, this was a new provision. We had never had this in the past. It was the first time that we had absolutely implemented it.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Was there any limit in the past?

Mr. Greg Essensa: No. There was no pre-writ.... None whatsoever.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Why did you find it necessary to put a limit in place? Once you did so, why did you choose the limit of $1 million?

Mr. Greg Essensa: I've been an electoral administrator for over 30 years. From watching elections being conducted federally, provincially and even municipally, it is clear that campaigns start much earlier than the 28-day or 35-day writ period.

Messaging and people's perspectives on political parties, leaders, etc., can often be informed in that pre-writ period. We were seeing an unequal balance between some political actors who had extensive funds and could fund many of these campaigns.

From my perspective, it effectively violated the core principle of our democracy, which is a fair and level playing field. We needed to ensure that those who had more funds than others could not just dominate the airwaves and, in effect, have a direct impact on the electoral result at the end of the writ period.

In Ontario, there was considerable debate amongst us. I travelled with the committee across the province. I heard from a number of stakeholders who supported some form of a pre-writ advertising limit.

I can't honestly say where $1 million came from. There was a lot of debate about different figures. Ultimately, that's what the government landed on and it made its way into the final versions of Bill 2.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: You also mentioned in your previous testimony that we should consider having a mechanism to regulate and figure out whether any of the money in our third party spending is coming from foreign actors. How have you gone about doing that? You referenced it a little bit.

I'm thinking more in terms of large, international organizations that have presence in Canada, have a branch in Canada or operate out of here, but also collect donations to do international work. How do they segregate the money that they spend and where is the money coming from, when it comes to the Ontario election?

Mr. Greg Essensa: I will be recommending to Ontario's legislators that we provide greater transparency into where the money comes from third parties and that there be a requirement for third parties to differentiate where funds are actually coming from in their financial reporting requirements and materials that they need to provide to us at Elections Ontario.

I would suggest this is something your committee may wish to consider while you're deliberating Bill C-76, to provide those mechanisms for the commissioner of Canada elections to, in fact, investigate where some of those funds are, requiring third parties to provide information on a fulsome basis as to the derivative of exactly where that money has come from and whose money is being used during the campaigns. I think there are—

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Help me clarify. You were unable to do that in this last election.

Mr. Greg Essensa: We did not have the authority to do that.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay.

Mr. Greg Essensa: It is something that I will be commenting on post-election, next March.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: How would you envision greater transparency? Would it be a separate election fund? Then they'd have to be able to trace all money that's deposited into the election campaign fund for that organization and let you know who the donors were. How would you do that?

● (1140)

Mr. Greg Essensa: I think it's very clear it's no different from what political parties are required to do now. You have to provide us with a list of who is providing you money that you utilized during your campaign.

We publicize those lists. Federally, here in Ontario, we have a 10-day direct posting, so if someone gives you $100 towards your campaign, we post it within 10 days of that. There are financial reporting requirements. I think that similar types of requirements could be put in place for third parties that would clearly indicate where the money was coming from, so that if XYZ corporation was supporting a third party and they're based in Alberta, and they gave $5,000 towards that third party, then you would clearly understand that's where the money came from, from that corporation. They provided the money and there was transparency to that.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Where does it end? That corporation may have money in their account that comes from foreign actors as well.

Mr. Greg Essensa: Very well, and you will have multinational corporations that have that. But I do believe there does need to be greater transparency in this process. I hear from Ontarians. Certainly up until we made the changes in Bill 2, and certainly when I travelled the province, I heard extensively from Ontarians who said that having third parties just spend in an unregulated way was something they were quite concerned about. They wanted to have greater transparency on where the money was coming from and who was spending this money.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: This piece of legislation doesn't deal with fundraising, but I've been dying to ask what the government's intentions were behind changing its fundraising rules to not allow candidates or nomination contestants to be present when conducting any kind of fundraising activities.

Mr. Greg Essensa: I think the previous government members, back in 2015 or 2016, found themselves on the wrong side of public opinion when it came to some of the fundraising tactics that they might've been using here in Ontario. They quickly moved to introduce Bill 2. They wanted to do it in a very transparent process. They asked me to sit as an adviser to the committee. They made the committee travel the province to hear. But, I think primarily, they wanted to get away from the public perception that ministers and politicians were influencing directly with contributors.

The bill did go to the extent of eliminating MPPs, ministers and leaders from attending fundraising events. It was quite a departure from the previous regimes that we had in place. I think early on, the party struggled a little bit with how to fundraise in that regard, but I think as we got closer to the event in 2018, all three parties sort of found their feet on how they could manage within those restrictions.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sahota.

We'll go to Mr. Nater again for five minutes.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Chair.

Again, thank you, Mr. Essensa, for joining us.

I'm going to jump around a couple of different topics in my short five minutes, and hopefully I can get to the topics I wanted to touch on.

I wanted to touch on the pre-writ spending. In that pre-writ period, is there also a limitation on government spending, or government advertising?

Mr. Greg Essensa: There is a limitation that is overseen by the Auditor General of Ontario, but there are limitations. There's a separate statute that is not my home statute which does regulate that, and the Auditor General does review those ads.

Mr. John Nater: Okay. Thank you, sir.

You mentioned e-poll books, and that you'd piloted that in by-elections and then implemented that in the general election back in June. I'm going to tie this with another question that goes with that.

On e-poll books, I'd appreciate any lessons learned from that piloting and implementation process, specifically on the technical side of things, but also on the connectivity side. There are regions of the province that don't have perfect connectivity coverage, 3G coverage.

This leads me to tying that with another question about the vote tabulators. Certainly from a viewer's perspective, the results came fast and furious. I was walking into a victory party about 12 minutes after the polls had closed and my local candidate had already been declared elected. It's a quick process with the vote tabulators.

I'm curious about lessons learned from that, again tying this with e-poll books. Were there any connectivity issues and challenges that came about because of rural and remote areas?

With regard to tying those two questions together, what are your thoughts?

● (1145)

Mr. Greg Essensa: We did our pilots in both Whitby—Oshawa, and Scarborough—Rouge River. When I wrote to the legislators, we were very transparent. We believed going into the election that we would only put technology in where we knew it would work.

We had our returning officers do a review of all the voting locations with a technical device to determine what type of connectivity we would get there. We put the technology in just slightly more than 50% of the voting locations in Ontario, but it represented that 90% of the electorate were going to those locations, meaning that 90% of electors voted using the technology.

As far as the technology itself is concerned, it far surpassed our expectations. On election day, we hovered between 99.4% and 99.6% connectivity with the 3,900 locations in which we had technology. It worked really, really well.

From the electorate's perspective, we recently received all of our research data. In Ontario, there is a requirement in the act to do a large survey. We ask about 10,000 Ontarians various questions, and some of the numbers coming back are staggeringly high. About 95% of general electors in Ontario were very supportive and found the technology easy to use, efficient and secure.

When it comes to the vote tabulators, they were the easiest part. It is a paper ballot. When I went into this process of trying to modernize the election, I was very cognizant that we wanted to maintain a paper ballot. I've conducted elections right across this country and in speaking to Canadians, most Canadians believe they want a tangible piece of evidence of how they voted. Maintaining a paper ballot was core to us.

With respect to the tabulators themselves, the technology is relatively simple. It's been around for 30 years. It's the same technology when you go to your grocery store and the clerk takes your cereal box and runs it over the scanner. It's not cutting-edge technology; it's tried and true technology.

On election day, we had over 4,000 tabulators in the field, and we literally had nickels and dimes, meaning we had some issues with 10 to 20 of them throughout the course of the day. No elector was ever disenfranchised. We had processes in place to ensure that they could still vote by using an auxiliary box.

From our perspective, the technology was a big benefit to us in this election.

Mr. John Nater: Very briefly, as I only have about a minute left, with regard to the audit function post-election, was an audit done to ensure that the number of votes cast through a tabulator corresponded with the number of paper ballots and the exact votes that were cast? Was an audit done to ensure that aligned?

Mr. Greg Essensa: We are currently doing that.

We effectively go through all 124 ridings here in Ontario and we do a complete audit. We look at every aspect. We look at the official returns; we recalculate them. We recount hand ballots, and we recount tabulator ballots by hand.

We're in the process of doing that complete audit right now. Our official results will be published at the end of November or early December, but we have found so far that everything has worked exactly as we intended and expected it to.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll go to Madam Lapointe.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, and thank you for being with us today, Mr. Essensa.

For the 2014 election, you changed your rules regarding the number of polling hours. Did I understand you correctly?

[*English*]

Mr. Greg Essensa: We had the same hours. What we did change substantively were advance voting days. In the previous regime we had 10 days of advance voting and the ability to rotate advance poll locations. If you were in central Ontario, it provided the returning officer the ability to have an advance poll for three days here, two days there, etc., and rotate throughout the riding.

The new rules that were in place for 2018 dramatically reduced that. We now had five consecutive days of voting. It also reduced the hours at advance polls by an hour. We no longer went from 9:00 a.m. until 9:00 p.m.. We went from 9:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m..

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Was the percentage of advance votes higher in 2018 than in 2014?

● (1150)

[*English*]

Mr. Greg Essensa: We saw a dramatic increase in advance polls. We had over 780,000 people vote in our five days of advance polls compared to 640,000 in 2014. It was a very healthy increase. A number of factors went into that. We moved to a spring election. We had longer daylight hours. There was a great deal of interest here in Ontario's election, given some of the changes that happened with some of the political parties. There was a great deal of media attention on that as well. I think all that contributed to a great deal of interest in the election and the increased turnout.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: For information purposes, what percentage of electors voted in 2018, in Ontario?

[*English*]

Mr. Greg Essensa: We saw a 58% turnout. We had just over 5.7 million Ontarians vote. That represented about a 7.5% increase from where we were in 2014. We saw a very healthy increase this election in voter turnout.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Were you able to easily reach young people of 25 or less? Earlier, there was a fair bit of talk about social media. Did you use different means to reach young people of 25 or under?

[*English*]

Mr. Greg Essensa: We did this election. We had a very active engagement and outreach program in Ontario. There are 50 college and university campuses. We were on all 50. We were on them six months before the election doing pre-registration drives. We launched an e-registration tool this election where we had almost a million people come on board to check and see whether they were on the list or not.

During the month of March, we had the legislature deem it voter registration month, and we had an extensive outreach campaign. Again, we were back on the 50 college and university campuses with outreach campaigns, registration drives. Then we proceeded to be on a third time during the writ period. For many of them we provided opportunities for them to vote at advance polls and again we had registration drives.

We are digesting all the numbers now and looking at the 18- to 24-year-old demographic, but we anticipate we'll see a higher turnout in that demographic this election.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: You say you expended a lot of effort to incite university and college students to vote. Did you use other means to reach those youngsters, for instance, social media?

[*English*]

Mr. Greg Essensa: We had an extensive social media campaign; we started two years ago. I'm a big believer that we need to have more frequent communication in particular on social media, on our Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts. Our goal was to ensure we were the factual representative of the election. If people had questions about who could vote, where, when and how they vote, all those facts, we wanted to drive them to our website. We wanted to drive them to us to get that factual information. We began our social media campaigns two years out. We would tweet twice a week. Sometimes they were just innocuous tweets, but they were tweets about coming to us to find out who can vote. If you need to use a special ballot, here's the special ballot program. Over the course of those two years we consistently increased the frequency; we tried to communicate using this forum as a vehicle to get our information to everyone.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll go back to Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Chair.

Following up a little on the youth voter turnout, Ontario implemented the provisional voter register for those who are 16 and 17. It included an option to withdraw. I'm curious about the success of that provisional register, how many names are on it and how many people may have withdrawn their name. What privacy and protection of personal information safeguards are included for that provisional register? Who has access to it and is it shared with anyone outside Elections Ontario?

Mr. Greg Essensa: There are a couple of things. The changes in Bill 45 did provide us with the ability to establish a future voters registry of 16- to 17-year-olds. We did work with our outreach teams. We worked with CIVIX and some of the other outreach initiatives that we have in place for the election.

My belief is that we have slightly more than 1,200 people now on our register of 16- to 17-year-olds. When we built our register we made it completely separate. It is not connected whatsoever to our current permanent register of electors and there is high security around who has access to it. We do not share the information with anyone and there are clear opportunities for an individual to remove themselves once they have put themselves on the register.

When they move towards 18, they are automatically moved to the permanent register of electors, but we do communicate with them and they do have an ability to opt out at that time should they wish to. I don't have the figures exactly in front of me, but I'm not aware of a very high number of people opting out at this particular time.

● (1155)

Mr. John Nater: Is there an automatic registration provision for when someone turns 18 who is not on the provisional register?

Mr. Greg Essensa: No. It's one of the challenges that all electoral administrators.... I've had extensive conversations with Elections Canada. It's an area we all struggle with because when someone automatically turns 18 sometimes the traditional means by which we get that information into our registers—CRA data or motor vehicle information, health information—is not as up to date as perhaps we would like it to be. It does create a bit of an issue for us in trying to get all of that 18- to 24-year-old demographic onto the register so that we can communicate with them effectively.

Mr. John Nater: Certainly one of the issues I hear about from time to time is the issue of accessibility. In this last provincial election, there was a concerted effort to ensure that voting locations were accessible for those Ontarians who are living with a disability, whether it was a mobility issue or other less visible types of disabilities.

I'm curious as to what challenges you encountered in ensuring the accessibility of voting locations, particularly in smaller rural and remote areas. As well, there seem to be distinctly fewer voting locations compared to before. Could I get your comments on whether that was a direct link to the accessibility side of things?

Mr. Greg Essensa: In Ontario, we have the Ontarians with Disabilities Act that we have to adhere to. We have standards that every voting location has to maintain.

At Elections Ontario, many times, particularly in the rural areas that you speak of, we have to mitigate accessibility issues. Oftentimes we will put in temporary ramps. We will provide infrastructure support to a particular location, because quite simply, that's the only location that we can utilize in a particular community that we now have to make accessible. We do spend a considerable amount of resources to in fact make many of those locations accessible. There are occurrences where quite simply, due to the nature of the building, we just cannot make it accessible and we sometimes have to look at other alternatives.

I would suggest to you that it's rare. It's more frequent, though, in the rural parts of Ontario where there is a limited number of sites that we can actually use for elections.

Mr. John Nater: In terms of candidates, campaigns and political parties, are there any resources or rebates provided to campaigns or to candidates to make their campaign offices accessible or to make their websites more friendly for those living with a disability? Are there any types of rebates or resources available from that side of things?

Mr. Greg Essensa: Not currently in Ontario's laws, no.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have two minutes left. Would the Liberals like to give that to Mr. Cullen?

An hon. member: Absolutely.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Look at the cross-partisan collaboration that's going on.

I have one quick question about the per-vote subsidy. How long has it existed in Ontario and is there any assessment as to the impact on the way that parties organized or fundraised and the effect on reaching other voters? Are you planning to do any kind of an impact analysis on it or does that not involve your office?

Mr. Greg Essensa: We definitely are going to do an impact analysis after this current election.

This was the first cycle that we had a per-vote subsidy that we've provided. When the deliberation under Bill 2 happened and the government made the determination to eliminate corporations and unions from being eligible to donate, the trade-off somewhat was to establish the per-vote subsidy that we've had in place. We pay that quarterly to the political parties.

I think the analysis that we're going to have to do is an overall analysis as to how much money they fundraised in relationship to the elimination of the corporate and union donations. When I appeared on Bill 2, I provided some insight into that. Between 2011 and 2014, $50 million of the $98 million that the parties had raised came from corporations and trade unions, so it was slightly more than 50%. The per-vote subsidy does not fully replace all of that.

● (1200)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: No.

Mr. Greg Essensa: We'll do an analysis as to how parties have done on the fundraising aspect since we've eliminated corporations and trade unions, and what the impact of the per-vote subsidy has been overall to their spending abilities.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That analysis will be made public, I assume.

Mr. Greg Essensa: Yes, it will, absolutely.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Providing a copy to this committee would help us a great deal.

Do you have a deadline as to when you're going to try to conduct it?

Mr. Greg Essensa: It won't be until next March. We're in the process of it now.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Great. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much for coming. We had a lot of questions. There was a lot of great information you provided. It's a big operation. We really appreciate that. It's quite relevant to our study.

Mr. Greg Essensa: Thank you very much.

The Chair: We'll suspend for a couple of minutes while we let people get organized.

• _____ (Pause) _____ •

• (1205)

The Chair: Welcome back to the 121st meeting of the committee on procedure and House affairs. We're in public.

I had a request to distribute the amendments. Is anyone opposed to the legislative clerk distributing the amendments he's received?

An hon. member: Only the good ones....

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): I'm not at all opposed to that.

The Chair: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. We'll distribute them right away.

Mr. Scott Reid: I guess the obvious question is, are they in both official languages?

Okay, yes. All right.

The Chair: We'll assume this is the deadline for submitting amendments, but people can always bring them to the floor.

We were debating the scheduling of Bill C-76, and subamendments and amendments.

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Chair, if you don't mind my starting this, I could just start talking about it, but I think it makes more sense to do this as a point of order, if you'll forgive me.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Scott Reid: The wording of the initial motion was:

> That the Committee commence clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-76 on Tuesday, October 2, 2018 at 11:00 a.m.;

This, of course, is now a point that is in the past.

The Chair: We have to change that, obviously.

Mr. Scott Reid: Right.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I was going to make a proposal to amend that.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I would amend it so it is just more logical, so that the committee would commence clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-76 on Thursday, October 4, at 11 a.m.

The rest of the motion would remain the same.

Mr. Scott Reid: What are the rules on changing something like that? Does it require unanimous consent, given that we're debating an amendment to this?

The Chair: That would be the easiest way.

Is there unanimous consent to do that?

Mr. Scott Reid: I'll just find out what my colleagues are—

The Chair: Obviously, we can't start clause-by-clause yesterday.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: It wouldn't approve the motion. It would just be approving the date so it would be a logical motion now and would not be in the past.

The Chair: Does everyone consider that to be a friendly amendment to the motion?

Mr. John Nater: No, I don't agree with that.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay. I would like to formally move an amendment to my motion then.

Mr. Scott Reid: I know what Ruby wants to do, and it's a reasonable thing. I know we're technically on my point of order, but if she can explain what it is she wants to do, I think that would add some light to it and it would be helpful in disposing of the point of order.

Maybe we could have Reid's codicil to the Simms protocol which says that even when it's a point of order, someone can interrupt to deal with something that will bring context.

• (1210)

Mr. Scott Simms: So you need permission then, don't you?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Does that say anything about filibusters?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: The point of order was on that point, which would resolve the point of order and no longer require the point of order to be made—

Mr. Scott Reid: Right.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: —if the original motion was amended.

So I propose that amendment to the original motion. That is my motion, to begin with, that the date now be revised to Thursday, October 4.

The Chair: Unfortunately, we have to deal with the subamendment to the amendment first, and then the amendment, and then your amendment.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: And then my amendment.

Mr. Scott Reid: Right.

Going back to the point of order...that was helpful.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: You're welcome.

Mr. Scott Reid: Procedurally, there are several ways one could go about this. One could seek to amend the current motion, which I think is what Ruby just proposed to do and which I think can be done only by unanimous consent.

The second thing one could do would be to simply seek to withdraw the initial motion entirely. I'm not sure if it's all right to transfer things.

Finally, we still have to deal with the fact that we're on a subamendment.

There was the initial motion. There was—

Ms. Ruby Sahota: [*Inaudible—Editor*] subamendment.

Mr. Scott Reid: Right, but procedurally we can still dig our way out.

The amendment was that the committee not commence clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-76 on Tuesday, October 2, 2018, at 11 a.m.

The first motion would have been nonsensical and therefore would have been made moot by the passage of time. Given the fact that we're talking about not doing something at a point in the past, I think it still would be in order if that amendment were actually to pass.

Finally, there was my own amendment to the amendment. This was before the committee had heard from the Ontario chief electoral officer "nor until the committee has heard from the Minister for Democratic Institutions for not less than one hour".

I'll just stop there.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Sahota, you're on the list.

You're just debating Mr. Reid's subamendment to the amendment.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Am I on the list for today or the previous list?

The Chair: I mean right now.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: The reason I was raising my hand originally was to get on the list first so that I could propose the revision to my original motion so it wouldn't be nonsensical at this point. That's the reason I had my hand up.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: It's already been said.

The Chair: So we have no speakers on the list.

Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: I go back to the question of whether this motion is in order, since it does deal with a date that has passed.

Is this motion in order at this point in time?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Let's vote on the subamendment now.

Mr. John Nater: Can we continue to debate a motion that, as has been mentioned, is nonsensical, on that point?

I look to the chair for clarification on that.

Mr. Scott Reid: Remember that the amendment causes it to not be nonsensical. You cannot agree to not do something that would have involved being in the past, thereby bringing logic to it. That wasn't the reason for the amendment being put in, but it does have that effect.

The Chair: You want the subamendment, then the amendment, and then the main motion can be amended if the committee wishes to.

Mr. John Nater: Well, then I'll—

The Chair: You're on Mr. Reid's subamendment to your amendment.

Mr. John Nater: I'm on the subamendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, again, to the committee for giving me the floor. It's always a pleasure to discuss this motion and discuss the subamendment that my able colleague has proposed.

Certainly one aspect of Mr. Reid's amendment has been dealt with in terms of the appearance today of the chief electoral officer of Ontario. Frankly, I found his testimony to be interesting, intriguing and fascinating. He touched on a number of issues that I think are related to the bill that we have before us in this committee in the examples that they had provincially, whether it be third party financing, the provisional voter registry or, more generally, concerning technology, which isn't directly foreseen in this bill, but has been something that the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada has touched on and commented on, particularly as it relates to e-poll books, how that was implemented provincially and the challenges that our CEO, Mr. Perrault, is having federally in terms of implementing that in a professional and appropriate way.

In his testimony last week, he noted that he is not in a position to roll forward with that in a testing capacity, which would normally be done in a by-election, in the by-election that we expect will occur at some point this fall. Currently there are vacancies in York—Simcoe as of Sunday, in Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, in Outremont, and I believe in Mr. Di Iorio's seat as well. I did notice that Mr. Di Iorio is still on the website. I'm not sure when his resignation takes effect. I thought it had happened back in the spring, but that doesn't seem to be the case since he still seems to be on the website. So, potentially there will be a by-election there, as well as in Burnaby—Douglas, which I think is Burnaby South right now.

Certainly there are opportunities in those by-elections to pilot certain things. However, the understanding is—and I think appropriately so—that the CEO is not willing to undertake that unless he has full confidence that the technology is there, has been tested and is ready to go. The information that we received this morning from the provincial CEO about how he rolled out that testing in the Whitby—Oshawa by-election and then rolled it out province-wide this past June is a positive.

His testimony was also worthwhile in terms of technology and how it is implemented. An interesting dynamic that those of us who have rural or remote ridings—mine is certainly more rural than remote—but, rural in terms of connectivity and the challenges we are faced with in terms of using new technology, whether it be e-poll books or vote tabulators.... I had the great privilege of using this technology during our federal leadership race in May 2017. I believe it was the same company and the same technology. They look like old fax machines.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. John Nater: It's related to the provincial CEO's testimony, which is—

● (1215)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: It has nothing to do with the subamendment.

Mr. John Nater: —part of the subamendment. And so—

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Mr. Graham, for that comment.

When I was a deputy returning officer, this technology was being used in the polling location that I was responsible for near Fergus, Ontario. Even there, in a relatively established area, there were challenges with the Wi-Fi, using the modem to connect, to the point that I had to physically move locations to connect. So there is that challenge.

What I found interesting and informative from the CEO's testimony is that 90% of voters voted at locations that employed this technology, whereas 50% of the locations employed the technology. That certainly takes into account a lot of the challenges that are faced in a number of areas. When we look at how the results came in, how they were tabulated, we see that the speed with which the results initially came in for the vast majority of the ridings, the vast majority of the polls within the ridings, showed the success of that. But we waited for some period of time to hear back from those locations that were using traditional tabulating of paper ballots. I think that's informative of how it worked. Certainly, the testimony he provided us in terms of the success rates—between 99.4% and 99.6% in terms of connectivity throughout the day—is positive, worthwhile and good to hear.

Whenever we, as a committee, or Canadians talk about new technology, there's always the concern of interference. The system that's been undertaken, as the CEO mentioned this morning, is really technology that is 30-plus years old, so it's not as though it's new in that sense, but it's certainly a new use of it.

But the ability to use that technology and also have the hard-copy ballots saved and maintained afterwards is worthwhile.

● (1220)

The Chair: Mr. Nater, I'll just remind you that the subamendment is only that the minister appear, so if you agree with that, you'll be making arguments as to why the minister should appear, or if you disagree, to why the minister should not appear.

Mr. John Nater: Sure, Chair. I'll focus my comments more going forward. I thought the subamendment included both the CEO of Ontario and the minister.

I do apologize for that, Chair.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: That's already happened.

Mr. John Nater: That is interesting. That has happened. We enjoyed hearing the CEO's testimony.

Going forward, I think it's absolutely important that we hear from the minister before we proceed to clause-by-clause. I was quite looking forward to hearing the minister testify at committee on Thursday at 3:30 p.m. Unfortunately, that didn't happen.

What really frustrated me was that from the government's side there was this implication that the testimony from the minister was some kind of gift bestowed upon the opposition by the government. Frankly, it's not. That's not the way it should be. The minister and her counterparts across the cabinet were given clear direction in their mandate letters that they should be available to committees. My hope is that the minister will appear once more before committee before we move to clause-by-clause so we can discuss some of the amendments.

I appreciate that the clerk will be distributing the amendments that have been submitted by all parties, and I understand that there are a number of them: from the government, the opposition and the third party, and from I believe the Green Party and potentially the Bloc, although I don't know that for a fact. I do know that Ms. May has submitted proposed amendments.

It's important, I think, that before we actually go to clause-by-clause—and now in the coming days we'll have access to the proposed amendments—we have the opportunity to speak with the minister. It's important to to hear from her and to have her indicate to us what direction she's looking to take in terms of which amendments would be acceptable to her from a government perspective, and what amendments she's not willing to undertake. The ability to have her appear before this committee at a certain point in time I think would be worthwhile. I think it would be beneficial.

Certainly, those of us who are on this committee have an interest in this file, obviously, since we're sitting on the committee that's studying the bill, but she, as the responsible minister, has an important vested interest as the minister responsible for this matter to appear and to indicate the government's direction. I appreciate, certainly, that we may not agree with every amendment that she proposes, and we may not agree with every amendment that the NDP or the Green Party may propose, but we would at least have an indication from the minister of what direction she would like to see.

From my perspective, I would be curious to see what amendments she would be willing to accept as they relate to third parties, so the ability to ask her whether she would agree to additional strengthening of some of the provisions on third parties.... Certainly, taking into account some of the comments that came from our Ontario CEO as they relate to third parties, I would be intrigued to hear whether she'd be amenable to strengthening some of those concerns, particularly—and again, this is in relation to the ongoing commentary and controversy south of the border—with regard to foreign influence and foreign interference. None of us wants to be talking about Russian interference and #FakeNews in terms of that foreign influence.

Clearly, too, I think most of the population, with perhaps some leading American figures excluded, believes that there was an act of interference in that election. I want to hear from the minister how she will go about addressing the concerns that are rightfully held by members—I think on all sides of this table—about how foreign influence will be dealt with in an upcoming election. How the minister will deal with that is certainly an open question.

I'd be curious to question her on whether she would adopt some of the testimony of the provincial CEO in terms of having all donations disclosed for a third party in regard to where the funding comes from, and whether that funding comes from a foreign entity or from an entity that perhaps mixes foreign funds with domestic funds. Hearing from the minister on that particular matter in terms of whether she'd be open to some increased reporting standards and accountability mechanisms that would prevent entities from using foreign funds in Canadian elections I think would be worthwhile.

As well, I think it would be worthwhile to question the minister on the role of the Auditor General. I found it interesting that the CEO brought up the point that the Auditor General conducts a review of government spending in the pre-writ period. That's an interesting way to address it.

● (1225)

As far as I know, the Auditor General doesn't have that role federally. I'd be curious to see the minister's comments on that, and whether she'd be open to having an audit role for the AG or another similar entity, perhaps the CEO, or perhaps someone not directly related to the elections, to review how government advertising is undertaken during the writ period and in the pre-writ period.

That goes along with a further commentary that, in the proposed legislation there is the pre-writ spending cap applying to political parties. I'd be interested to hear the minister's comments on whether she would be open to aligning the periods for federal advertising, as well as ministerial announcements and parliamentary and ministerial travel that could conceivably be seen as being done with an electoral purpose. I would want to know whether the minister would be open to reviewing that type of function.

For all intents and purposes, it appeared as though the minister was open to having these conversations. She certainly, physically, showed up on Thursday at 3:30 p.m. She sat through the entire meeting in Centre Block. She had notes in front of her. Conceivably, she was prepared to testify and was open to questions from this committee.

That didn't happen. A motion was brought forward at the beginning of the meeting, before the minister could testify, which we debated throughout the meeting. It was the guillotine motion that's now before us. The actual original motion, I guess, was to revive that motion for debate rather than doing so after the minister's testimony. That's unfortunate. As I said, I don't think the appearance of a minister at committee should be seen as some kind of gift or some kind of benefit that's provided to committees only if we agree to a programming motion, only if we agree to a guillotine motion. I don't think that's appropriate, especially when you review the mandate letters of ministers, which focus on them appearing before committees.

Another thing I wanted to hear from the minister before we move forward is her focus and her efforts to implement a similar provisional voter registry, as was undertaken in Ontario. The CEO of Ontario provided some positive commentary on that. In their example, it was an optional registry. In ours, it was an automatic registry. In both cases, the option is to withdraw at some point in time. I'd be curious to know the minister's thoughts on those two strategies, and which one is more appropriate from a federal perspective.

On the provincial perspective, the CEO, Mr. Essensa, mentioned that about 1,200 people, give or take, were on the register. That seems exceptionally low given the population of Ontario and given the number of 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds that are out there, particularly since the vast majority of 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds are currently in high school, so they're in a public institution that a CEO or an elections official would have access to. That 1,200 number seems low. I'd be curious to hear the minister's commentary, one way or another, in terms of how that's undertaken. The CEO appeared to indicate that the number of people who have withdrawn is exceptionally low. I think that's a positive outcome. It would be curious to see whether that bears out when it's a mandatory or an automatic registration.

This ties in with the privacy concerns with that. I was pleased to hear from the provincial CEO that this data is guarded within Elections Ontario. It is not shared with political parties. It's not shared with third parties. It's not shared outside of Elections Ontario. I think that's an important matter that we need to assure ourselves of: that similar provisions are in place.

● (1230)

Federally, we've heard from the former acting minister, Mr. Brison, in a commentary on the bill itself in the House, that it would not be the case that this information would be shared with people outside Elections Canada. That's reassuring, but as well, we need to assure ourselves that it is the fact.

As the corollary to that as well, when people do turn 18 and they become eligible to vote, those names are then added to the permanent voters list, at which point, of course, as registered voters, people are entitled to vote in the federal election. That information would be shared with those actors in the political process that have the right to have that information.

While I'm on the subject of privacy, and Mr. Cullen brought up the issue of privacy regulations, privacy rules, how we go about dealing with the challenges of protection of personal data, protection of information. Certainly, this bill has some measures designed to move us toward that, but on hearing from different witnesses, different experts, there is no agreement that it goes far enough. I'd be curious to know from the minister, if she's had any change of heart in terms of how questions of privacy are dealt with in this legislation.

One matter on which I'd like to hear from the minister, when she appears and hopefully that can happen, is whether she feels the federal privacy legislation, PIPEDA, applies completely to those actors within the political process, or whether some aspects of it could be applied to the process. We've heard testimony both from the CEO and from the Privacy Commissioner who have made specific suggestions around the privacy question and personal information. Being able to go forward and have that conversation with the minister and question her as to whether or not she will accept those recommendations from those commissioners, or whether she has an alternative proposal to do so, would be of benefit to the committee.

Certainly, the legislation has made the provision that parties will have a privacy policy that would be subject to oversight by the Chief Electoral Officer. That's probably a worthwhile process with which to begin. Whether that's the long-term policy or not would be something the minister will have to address during her testimony, if and when she appears before this committee.

Another issue that is worth articulating, and worth having that conversation with the minister about, relates to the anti-collusion provisions that the provincial government has implemented. I was heartened to hear there were allegations—I shouldn't say heartened to hear there were allegations. I should say that I was heartened to hear how the CEO dealt with allegations of collusion among political actors, among third parties and how those were investigated.

I'd be curious to hear whether the minister would be open to strengthening and implementing strong anti-collusion provisions within the federal legislation to ensure that third parties and political actors are not trying to get around the rules and the limits that exist within legislation to influence beyond what they ought to be able to influence.

The Ontario CEO, as a corollary to that, brought up the example of the minimum spending limit, it being $500 in Ontario, and the challenge of forcing that within a digital environment. We could take a step further and look at that writ large with advertising in general.

● (1235)

With online advertising, whether it's on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or more traditional banner ads on websites, it's difficult to maintain a registry or an observation of these advertisements. Unless you or someone connected with the campaign have observed them first-hand, there's not typically a permanent record of that available online. It may not ever even appear to someone individually, based on the metrics that are indicated in an advertisement.

For example, on Facebook, it can be targeted to people who like a certain page, who may have certain page likes within their Facebook account, so based on that, you may or you may not see a political ad.

If I happen to like the Conservative Party of Canada on Facebook, if I happen to like Andrew Scheer on Facebook, the Liberal Party or the New Democrats—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: You might need a sanity check.

Mr. John Nater: I might need a sanity check, but that goes for politicians in general.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It's probably true.

Mr. John Nater: Chances are that, if the NDP or the Liberals are running an ad, those who like Andrew Scheer and those who like the Conservative Party or similar entities will be excluded from seeing that ad. The ability to know what its money is being spent on is largely limited to actually being able to physically view an ad. When we have the minister here, we need to have that conversation about how we go about ensuring that, particularly as it relates to third parties.

In terms of political actors, the disclosure of information is, I would say, fairly robust. We are, through the Canada Elections Act, required to report all expenses, all contributions, so it's dealt with that way. Again, there are always challenges, but if money was spent on Facebook advertising, if money was spent on online advertising, as a matter of the law and as a matter of electoral rebates, for that matter, political entities report that on their returns.

A third party who is not required to register, though, will not have those same dynamics, so we need to have the conversation with the minister in terms of how we go about addressing those types of concerns, particularly in a digital environment.

Now, I don't claim to have the magic solution to any of those challenges. Certainly, there are options available for this committee, and I look forward to seeing the amendments that are being brought forward by all political parties, to see if there's something in there that we could adopt and implement that would allow us the opportunity to go about that direction, to look at ways in which we can ensure that third party rules foresee some form of digital advertising and how to address that digital advertising when it happens. Perhaps it is real-time reporting of all expenses of third parties, together with the forced registry of all third parties, so whether they spend $1, $500, or $5,000, I think that would be one way to go about that. Certainly, the provincial CEO indicated that it would be easier for him to determine a $3,000 or $5,000 threshold, or a zero-dollar threshold, but when you come to a $500 threshold, you're certainly kind of using a judgment call and it makes it more challenging to see where that happens and where that comes into play.

Certainly more generally, it's a conversation that needs to be had with the minister more broadly, on how we deal with new technologies and new ways of communicating that don't always appear in the traditional way of doing business in an election. I'm a new MP, but I've been involved in election campaigns for my adult life, and I very much remember that original advertising was very much focused on radio and television ads, and in smaller communities on the weekly newspaper and the local newspaper. For those, it was very easy to indicate who spent the money to pay for the ad, which campaign was doing that, because it said that it was authorized by the official agent for so and so. That certainly was the way it was dealt with in the past, in terms of how we traditionally campaign.

In the new era, it's more challenging to have that clarity in terms of what ads pop up in one's stream. There are ways that you can see individual pages and what advertisements they are undertaking, but it's not always clear to a voter, to a constituent, to a Canadian, in terms of where those are being targeted and where they are undertaken.

I would note that you can click on, I believe, the "About" tab and see which ads are being currently run by a particular page, but again it doesn't show who paid for them and who's authorized those ads. Particularly on a Facebook page, it may not have a clear definition of who it is. Certainly, if the Facebook page was "John Nater, MP", you could reasonably assume that's a Facebook page that is related to John Nater, or John Nater for the Conservative Party, or some kind of indication that it's connected to that.

● (1240)

The challenge we're facing, however, and where we need direction and clarity is with other entities. If there were a "Friends of John Nater" campaign that had a Facebook page, determining exactly who the friends of John Nater are would be a challenge.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Just in general?

Mr. John Nater: Just in general.

Mr. Scott Reid: It's a challenge we've all struggled with.

Mr. John Nater: Yes, who your friends are in politics is not always easily determined.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That's so sad, John.

Mr. John Nater: I kid.

Mr. Scott Reid: We could be reduced to tears by this. This is very unexpected.

Mr. John Nater: The point is that we need some clarity from the department and from the minister in terms of how we go about that. Any individual can create a Facebook page and call it whatever they want. "Friends of John Nater" is an example, but it could be a Facebook page such as "Canadians for a Clean Environment", "Canadians for Increased International Trade", or "Canadians for a Strong Manufacturing Sector". There are no limits on how a Facebook page can be created, and for an issue like that, we need to ensure that we are engaging the supply management, or rather, social media companies, in terms of what efforts we make. I had SM in my mind, so social media, supply management....

I think that on a proactive basis, we've seen movement from social media companies to ensure that clearly fake accounts or bots, as they are called, are being whittled away. They are being eliminated, but you can only do so much in any given situation. When we hear from the minister, we need to hear her plan and her strategy to go forward, in terms of what options there are to go about that process.

We talk about Facebook and we talk about Twitter. Those seem to be the primary mechanisms. We heard from the Ontario chief electoral officer this morning, who noted that he has had a relatively positive working relationship with those companies, those businesses. That's what they are; they are businesses.

I'd be curious to hear from the minister about what outreach efforts she has undertaken, in terms of working with Facebook or Twitter, to determine what the next steps are, either with a voluntary approach or with a regulatory or legislative approach, whether it's in time for the next election or whether it's something that we will wait for a future election to see, an election in 2023. I guess that would be the conceivable next step.

I think we need to hear from the minister and have that conversation with her about what the appropriate steps are on this. We hear about Cambridge Analytica, and we hear about the data mining practices that went on in other jurisdictions, but hearing from her, hearing her perspective about what the next steps should be on a matter such as this would be worth the conversation.

Again, when we see the amendments that have come forward from all parties around this table and those represented in the House but not necessarily holding official party status, it would be worthwhile to see if there is one that may address the digital progress that's being undertaken.

The corollary to that is enforcement. Enforcement is a challenge, especially for elections where so much of the enforcement would happen after the fact. If you have an election that is completed, and there's evidence of overspending, of non-registry, or of foreign influence, it's very difficult to correct that fact after an election has been completed. Certainly that's something that was noted before this committee by those who testified. It has been noted in other places and in other commentary. Being able to enforce something at the time of the infraction is a matter that we as a committee have to grapple with and to deal with.

Failure to do so, and the forced wait until after an election has occurred provide very little in terms of corrective practices or corrective ability to fix it at that point in time. If we wait until we've submitted all our financial filings and our audited financial statements after an election campaign, often that's months in before Elections Canada can determine whether an infraction has taken place. We need to look at where that ought to go and what powers should rest with either the Chief Electoral Officer or perhaps the commissioner of elections to make that happen.

● (1245)

Of course, that's one matter, but another matter that I think we as Canadians worry about is security and privacy. More generally, we want to ensure that our data, our personal information, is safe, whether that's information held by Elections Canada or by political parties.

I found the testimony from the Ontario CEO to be informative when he stated there was little evidence of that type of interference and threat, but I thought his additional commentary was even more important, that there were in fact failed attempts to access information, which is positive to see, but nonetheless there were attempts to do so.

I was heartened that he made the comment that this information was then shared with the appropriate channels, the CSE, Communications Security Establishment.... I think it's worthwhile to try to determine where these threats may have come from. I would say the robustness of the province's structures and mechanisms in place to have prevented that attempt is positive.

I'd be curious to hear from the minister if she is aware of specific examples of threats against federal information and whether that's within Elections Canada itself or maybe within a political party—their apparatus, their databases—or any other entity at the federal level that would, by its nature, have personal data on Canadian voters.

I know each political party has access to the voters list of every Canadian who is eligible to vote. That information is shared with Elections Canada by a variety of sources, not the least of which is the Canada Revenue Agency. Certainly, Canada Revenue Agency ensures that Canadians pay their taxes, so one would hope that information would be correct, but that's not always the case. My questions for the minister would be the following: How do we work out a plan? What suggestions would she have to ensure that the information shared with Elections Canada, from entities such as Canada Revenue Agency, will be accurate? How would she ensure that only those who are eligible to vote can vote in elections?

In each of our constituencies we can point to examples of constituents who may have failed to file their taxes on time and have challenges with wrong addresses, wrong names, that end up with CRA data, which is then transferred from the Canada Revenue Agency to Elections Canada. I know of at least two examples in my riding where someone was indicated as being deceased by CRA. If that information is then passed on to Elections Canada, it would be a concern when someone goes to vote. Having a process in place would ensure that is dealt with at that point in time.

Any voter who is eligible to vote could go to the poll on election day and prove who they are and be added to the voters list at that point, but that information being foreseen at that point in time is a challenge.

● (1250)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: A point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Just before the point of order, I want to let the committee know how many amendments there are. The clerk just gave me this, which you are going to be receiving soon. There are from the Liberals, 66; from the Conservatives, 204; from the NDP, 29; from the Green Party, 17; and from the Bloc, two.

You have a point of order, Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I'm disappointed in the Bloc. I mean, two amendments. Where's the effort?

This is a small point, and I know it somewhat involves people at the table and people not at the table. At some point, considering the number of amendments, substantive work on this bill is needed. I'm not sure I've encountered a bill with that many amendments coming from all sides.

Clearly, from the testimony we've heard to this point, which I think is the last of the testimony we'll hear, there's an enormous amount of work to be done.

There seem to be some sticking points, particularly between the Liberals and the Conservatives, over some of the issues around pre-writ spending and some of the other factors. They are legitimate concerns to have, and a legitimate conversation to have. We have, of course, some amendments that we're working on around privacy and social media, which I think, again, have been supported by testimony.

To the larger case of the parliamentary process, with whatever urgency I would encourage the government and the official opposition to work some of this stuff out so that we can get some sort of process in front of us. As we've heard from the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, they've prepared some of these changes. The longer we take, the fewer and fewer options they have to make the changes, many of which all parties at this table agree with.

I fully support allowing Mr. Nater and others to use the privileges that were granted to apply pressure to a bill by using up time, but I don't yet get the sense from the government or the official opposition.... I'm going to say to colleagues on the government side in particular to get on with figuring out where the sticking points are. If we can't solve them, then press the point. People may smile, but at some point you have to decide what you actually want done with this bill and at what urgency you wish to see it done. Some of it is unpleasant, but it's required if you want to see this through. New Democrats want this bill passed with some substantial things in it changed, yet we want to see this bill passed.

I apologize to Mr. Nater and his commentary—

● (1255)

Mr. John Nater: Not at all.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: —but going through this same process again and again, meeting after meeting, is less than productive, and the pressure is not mounting sufficiently to change the course we're on right now.

I'm trying to be fair. Everyone has a role to play. My goodness, let's not have these meetings if they're just going to be the same thing. If we're going to have these meetings, then let's have some productive dialogue over the disputes on what this bill should look like. That is what we're here to do.

That's it, Chair, and that wasn't a point of order.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

If you continue the filibuster, I may at some time propose we just see the clock at four in the morning.

Anyway, Mr. Nater, carry on.

Mr. John Nater: I do see, Chair, that it's nearing one o'clock.

Is there an indication that we'll continue past one o'clock?

The Chair: At one o'clock, I'll ask the committee what its will is on whether to go past the scheduled time.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: That's in about four minutes.

Mr. John Nater: Okay. Thank you, Chair. I appreciate that.

I think the commentary from Mr. Cullen is informative. It is incumbent on all political parties to see if we can't come to an agreement. It may be an agreement to disagree on a number of points but an agreement to agree on certain points—what the next steps are and what the next few days and few meetings may entail in terms of where we go. I also appreciate the commentary from our clerk and the information provided.

In terms of the number of amendments proposed by each political party, I do see the 204 from the Conservatives as a healthy number. I think that's reflective of the role of the official opposition in terms of the scrutiny of legislation. But I find it interesting and informative, and it relates directly to this amendment, that 66 proposals for amendments have been submitted by the government to their own legislation.

I think that's very germane to the subamendment at hand in terms of hearing from the minister on these 66 amendments that have been proposed by the governing party—where those amendments are focused; why the government feels that the initial draft of the bill was not appropriate in those 66 cases; which ones are substantive elements; and which ones are more housekeeping or minor amendments, whether it's a grammatical change, spelling errors, or fixing numbers within a bill. I think those are general housekeeping matters, and I think that's what happens with any bill that might be brought forward.

For the substantive matters, however, exactly why has this decision been made? Whether it's reflective of testimony we heard here at committee, whether it's a reflection of the change in opinion or the change in direction that the government has decided to take, or whether it's unrelated to those matters but is related, rather, to current events that have happened between the time this bill was implemented and where we are today, on October 2, nearly five months after the initial implementation of this bill, hearing from the minister, hearing her address those 66 amendments, and hearing her outline the reasons for those as well....

When the time comes and we get to clause-by-clause, the government will have the majority to pass any or all of those 66 amendments. In the same way, the government has their numbers to pass or not pass the 204 Conservative amendments, the 29 NDP amendments, the 17 Green Party amendments, and the two amendments from the Bloc. Certainly, I suspect there will be overlap in terms of these amendments and where the interest lies. It will be a matter of trying to choose which of the....

Sorry, Chair.

● (1300)

The Chair: We're at our scheduled time. I need to know the will of the committee on whether they wish to carry on or not.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: I move that the meeting be adjourned.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there no interest in carrying on? Okay.

The meeting is adjourned.

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